

Neuro-Inclusive Onboarding for Young Workers :

Tips for working with neurodivergent young people

Neurodivergence includes (for example) autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette's. Needs vary — ask, don't assume.

Your legal duty (Vic/Aus): provide reasonable adjustments and avoid discrimination. Ask the worker (and parent/guardian if under 18, with the young person's consent) what helps them do their best. Note agreed adjustments and review after a few shifts.

Recruitment & onboarding

- Offer a short, concrete job preview and clear selection criteria.
- Allow alternatives to on-the-spot interviews (e.g., questions sent ahead, written answers, or a short **paid** trial with clear tasks).
- Invite a support person if helpful (for U18s, involve a parent/guardian where appropriate).
- Day 1: provide a simple duties list, a map of the workspace, who to ask for help, and the first-week schedule.

Communication that works

- Give instructions **both verbally and in writing** (dot points/checklists).
- Avoid idioms ("hit the ground running"); be literal and specific.
- Use **show–do–check** training and ask for teach-back ("Can you walk me through it?").
- Allow processing time; don't insist on eye contact.
- Give feedback privately, with one or two actionable points at a time.

Rostering, pace & breaks

- Keep rosters predictable; give changes as early as possible.
- Use shorter, more frequent breaks if needed (quiet space helps).
- Chunk tasks and set mini-deadlines ("By 10:30, label these 3 trays").

Sensory environment

- Reduce noise where you can; offer earplugs/ear defenders.
- Adjust lighting (avoid flicker; offer a visor/peak cap).
- Allow comfortable uniform options (textures, layers) and minimise strong scents.
- Provide a consistent workstation for routine tasks where possible.

When things get overwhelming

- Agree a simple “**reset plan**” (e.g., step outside/quiet room for 5–10 minutes, message the supervisor).
- Recognise **shutdowns vs meltdowns**; focus on safety, reduce demands, and debrief later — not mid-escalation.
- Reassign to lower-stimulus tasks during peak periods if helpful.

Role fit & tools

- Match tasks to strengths (e.g., back-of-house prep, inventory, cleaning checklists, POS in quiet periods).
- Provide tools: timers, written SOPs, visual checklists, spell-check aids, step-by-step guides, POS “training mode”.

Privacy & consent

- Keep adjustment details confidential; share on a **need-to-know** basis.
- For under-18s, involve parents/guardians with the young person’s agreement.

Low-cost adjustments many shops use

- Visual task board with 3–5 items max.
- “First 30 minutes” routine card at the start of each shift.
- Quiet break option; permission to use fidgets/stimming that’s safe and hygienic.
- Scripts for common customer phrases; laminated cue cards.
- Colour-coded labels and shelves to reduce errors.

Helpful resources to explore later: JobAccess (workplace adjustments), Amaze (Autism Vic), ADHD Australia, Australian Dyslexia Association.